

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



Woolf and McClintock and the Nature of Cyberspace

By Elizabeth Lambert

Reading a 15th-Century English Woman's Life:
The Character of Margaret Paston As Revealed Through Her Letters

By Rosanne Fleszar Denhard

Poetry by:

Rosemary Starace, Cynthia Richardson and Peter Filkins

Appendix Seven

Fiction by Robert Abel

Of Roads and a Pasture:
The Genesis of Two Poems by Robert Frost

By Lea Bertani Newman

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Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Formerly North Adams State College

375 Church Street

North Adams, MA 01247-4100

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Editor's File

As we anticipate the turning of the millennial clock, I am inspired to suggest that the contributions to this edition of *The Mind's Eye* relate to this transitional moment in unique and interesting ways. Our lead piece by Elizabeth Lambert, winner of the Faculty Lecture Series Award, explores the creativity of science as it touches upon the imaginative tradition of the novel and the futuristic concepts of cyberspace. Robert Abel's compelling short fiction involves human encounters with issues of immigration that will continue to be social and historical realities well into the next thousand years. The life of a 15th-century woman takes on a remarkably enduring significance in Rosanne Denhard's literary-historical account of Margaret Paston. Lea Newman's literary critique provides some contemporary insight into Robert Frost's use of timeless metaphors in "The Road Not Taken" and "The Pasture." Within these pages, the living tradition of poetry moves forward into the new millennium with the creations of Peter Filkins, Cynthia Richardson and Rosemary Starace.

The Fall 1999 issue also inaugurates the third year of publication of the "new" *Mind's Eye*. The magazine enjoys a robust circulation of about 1000 copies per issue and continues to grow as an important addition to our own campus and the surrounding community. We are, of course, very grateful for support from the college—President Thomas Aceto and the Board of Trustees—and from our colleagues, on and off campus, whose contributions to these pages have been essential to the life of the journal. And, as the days grow shorter and memory longer, we think once more of Charlie McIsaac, former *Mind's Eye* editor, and are grateful, too, for his life, his commitment to human endeavor and to the quality of the written word that are, in many ways, the legacy of this journal.

Tony Gengarelly
Managing Editor

Woolf and McClintock and the Nature of Cyberspace

BY ELIZABETH LAMBERT

In Virginia Woolf's 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*, the artist Lily Briscoe asks young Andrew Ramsay what his father's books are about. When his answer, "'Subject and object and the nature of reality,'" needs clarification, he suggests she "'think of a kitchen table . . . when you're not there'" (38). Lily, however, imagines the table "lodged now in . . . a pear tree, for they had reached the orchard" (38). Then, "with a painful effort of concentration," Lily demonstrates one of the reasons the coming cyberworld of virtual reality may not be the revolution in consciousness it is often heralded as: "She focused her mind, not upon the silver-bossed bark of the tree, or upon its fish-shaped leaves, but upon a phantom kitchen table . . . which stuck there, its four legs in the air" (38).

The table in the pear tree, "this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table (and it was a mark of the finest minds so to do)" (38), is one of the more playful moments in a process Lily's visual mind enacts throughout the novel, as did Woolf's visual mind throughout her life. Not only does she demonstrate the mind's ability to experience what isn't materially present, but she places the methods and terms of a discourse, such as philosophy, into contexts that comment on the limits of the discourse.

Several recent critics have done the same for the narratives currently in the process of creating the electronically mediated world labeled cyberspace, which, according to one of those critics, is the latest version of an ancient urge "to exteriorize our own neurological drama" (Porush 551). Like that other longed-for and dreaded nonplace, the afterlife, cyberspace is a kind of potential around which mythologies have encrusted themselves and are helping make manifest. Several of those narratives were interrogated in the Fall 1994 special issue of *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology*. As I read the issue I found myself exteriorizing my own neurological drama by constantly marking the margins with the names of two brilliant women who were near contemporaries. Neither was mentioned in the issue, but both can act as guides through the various worlds without end promised by cyberspace: British writer Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) and American biologist Barbara McClintock (1902–1992).

Woolf and McClintock never crossed paths and, while it is possible McClintock heard of Woolf, it is unlikely Woolf knew of McClintock. Yet both had similar, extraordinary powers of concentration and visualization and both took communication as a focus. Woolf, who wrote nine novels and volume after volume of essays, short fiction, diaries and letters, explored language itself. McClintock explored the genetic coding of corn, a staple of genetics research. Her questions and approaches increasingly isolated her from her colleagues to the point that her discovery of transposition, which eventually won her a Nobel Prize, was initially misunderstood by some and posed a puzzle for those who did understand but couldn't connect it to accepted ideas.

Transposition suggests that certain genes can change position on a chromosome, enabling the DNA of a cell to rearrange itself in response to signals from the cell environment, in a kind of feedback mechanism. According to McClintock's biographer, Evelyn Fox Keller, her colleagues lacked the context needed to understand the significance of her discovery. In *A Feeling for the Organism*, Keller presents McClintock's story in part "as a book about language—about worlds of discourse that operate to shape the growth of specific areas of research . . ." and as a study "of the relations between creativity and validation, between individual and community, and between one community's conception of science and another's . . ." (xv).

As Keller points out, in everyday life "the level of shared vision required for people to cooperate is usually met. But science and art alike make tougher demands on intersubjectivity: Both are crucially dependent on internal visions, committed to conveying what the everyday eye cannot see" (150). Both Woolf's and McClintock's work made demands that kept them out of the mainstream while keeping the prob-

lem of communicating across different contexts central to their lives. Keller expresses McClintock's motives with words that apply to Woolf as well: "McClintock's feeling for the organism . . . is a longing to embrace the world in its very being, through reason and beyond" (199). Although Woolf and McClintock were artists on different sides of a disciplinary divide, McClintock's words explain a method she shared with Woolf: to "hear what the material has to say to you" (198). Together, the writer who probed the worlds of language and the scientist who nurtured relationships with the material world provide a means of illuminating current debates that stretch along a continuum from those who conceptualize cyberspace as a revolution in consciousness to others who "explore the ways in which virtual realities conserve and incorporate rather than overthrow . . . the Platonist division of the world into the physical and metaphysical in which ideal forms are valued over material content" (Markley, "Introduction" 437).

What I hope to do, after a look at two cybercritics of *Configurations*, is to give McClintock and Woolf the opportunity to elaborate a request by the issue's editor, Robert Markley. He asks us to question the values and assumptions of virtual technologies, and suggests we do so by investigating the real-world contexts in which the technology is conceptualized, created and distributed. Woolf and McClintock provide insight into that conceptual context of subject, object and the nature of reality.

The term "cyberspace" came into the world through fiction, the now-mythologized 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson, who envisioned it as a "consensual hallucination" and a pretty awful place.¹ Since then, cyberspace has come to mean many things: at a minimum, the electronically mediated "space" created by cybernetic technologies, which, in the current real world, include some computer-networked games with many players in different locations, and virtual-reality gear, through which humans literally plug themselves into massive feedback loops that simulate the material world and evoke the appropriate physical sensations.

Pointing out that when concepts of cyberspace include "everything from e-mail to GameBoy cartridges" ("Introduction" 434), they become too broad to be useful, Markley cites several definitions ranging from an emphasis on the technology to an emphasis on the mystical. Michael Benedikt, editor of *Cyberspace: First Steps*, calls cyberspace "a globally networked, computer-sustained, computer-accessed, and computer-generated multidimensional, artificial, or 'virtual' reality" (qtd. in "Introduction" 434). The definition from Marcos Novak's article in *Cyberspace: First Steps* emphasizes both the "space" and the human sensory system that interact through technology:

Cyberspace is a completely spatialized visualization of all information in global information processing systems, along pathways provided by present and future communication networks, enabling full copresence and interaction of multiple users, allowing input and output from and to the full human sensorium, permitting simulations of real and virtual realities, remote data collection and control through telepresence, and total integration and intercommunication with a full range of intelligent products and environments in real space. (qtd. in "Introduction" 434–35)

Novak adds that cyberspace is "the place where conscious dreaming meets subconscious dreaming, a landscape of rational magic, of mystical reasoning, the locus and triumph of poetry over poverty . . ." (435). Currently, in environments in real space, better living through cyberspace is not yet realized.

A long list of the good things that cyberspace will bring to life, culled from various papers and presentations, appears in a *Configurations* article by David Porush.² A small sample includes renovating human relations, providing universal education, "bypassing the infirmities of the body," "liberating the mind from its inevitably neurotic relationship to the body," providing a new frontier, allowing for immortality, creating utopian workplaces and making it possible to have sex without bodies (553–54). In several, if not all, of these potentials can be heard the "Platonist division of the world into the physical and metaphysical in which ideal forms are valued over material content" ("Introduction" 437). The encompassing claims, the ones that promise cyberspace to be more than just interactive TV with smell and touch, are claims to a kind of metaphysical break from the past, through which revolutionized human consciousness will be "freed" from the body, or at least have a totally different, and more positive, relationship to the troublesome body and various material and immaterial worlds.

According to this revolutionary view, the major problem will be equalizing access to the technology. However, one of the common points made by contributors to the *Configurations* issue is that a critique of access problems is not enough. According to Markley, "The blind spot of many critiques of virtual technologies lies in their linked rhetoric of progress as natural and inevitable, and their acceptance of the view that we are living in revolutionary times in which technology can intervene in subjectivity in ways undreamt of prior to the twentieth century. . . . It is only by situating cyberspace in the contexts it seeks to transcend that we can begin to dream of a different kind of 'real'" ("Introduction" 438–39).

The context Markley provides examines the mathematics that promises to transcend the mind/body split and create a shared imagination through virtual reality technology. He characterizes cyberspace as "the ultimate capitalist fantasy because it promises to exploit our own desires as the inexhaustible material of consumption" ("Boundaries" 504) in the boundless territory of cyberspace, now that we've greatly ruined our material territories. Markley says the narrative celebrating a virtual reality that "offers the alluring fiction of limitless possibilities and connections" ("Boundaries" 499) supports the view that cyberspace will transcend the mind/body split. In this narrative, the virtual world offers a nonhierarchical space where the individual becomes a self-creating, self-observing whole; the virtual world is a space in which one's imagination becomes objective and shared with others. In contrast, real reality in this narrative is devalued as an imperfect state in which the individual is alienated from self and environment.

The mathematics developed to allow for "instantaneous feedback of billions of bits of information that can be translated into direct sensory input" is based on a type of logic called boundary logic, developed in part by mathematician William Bricken, with debts to Plato and Leibniz ("Boundaries" 490). According to Markley, the math is traditionally Platonist, based on the assumption that the universe is computable and that mathematics reveals its structure. Boundary logic uses the concepts of calling (making a mark or creating a perspective) and crossing (changing the perspective). The symbol of the mark is described by educator Meredith Bricken as "a cluster of attributes . . . a distinction and the observer making the distinction . . . a symbol and a process. . . . The mark exists in a context of continuous space; it generates systems and determines their functioning'" (qtd. in "Boundaries" 490). Markley summarizes the mark as "both a notational device and a metaphysical marker of one's unique location in the 'continuous context' of space. . . . Form, identity and value are thus generated by the intentional, Ur-statements of boundary logic: I mark, therefore I am; I am the mark, therefore I am" ("Boundaries" 491).

An individual operating in cyberspace is a kind of updated monad—a point of intention that creates a unity of space and identity by making symbols, so that, in William Bricken's words, "'space (and experience) are pervasive rather than dualistic . . . both/and inclusions rather than either/or dichotomies'" (qtd. in "Boundaries" 495). Cyberspace comes with the implicit promise that the "self" created will not suffer the fragmentation and alienation that most selves experience in real reality. This is not just a marketing strategy but a metaphysical aspect of boundary logic.

Markley points out that cyberspace, then, incorporates the oppositional logic it supposedly disrupts. An individual is either calling or crossing, be-

coming whole in virtual space or remaining fragmented and alienated in real space. The "self" that Markley sees being created is that of "a thoroughly efficient desiring machine" ("Boundaries" 504), becoming trained to participate in the "reproduction and satisfaction of endless desire" ("Boundaries" 507). The promise of becoming one's real self through technology also ironically relies on reinforcing the alienation it supposedly eliminates: The relationship of the user to the technology, which provides the ground for the new world, is embedded in real reality and not extended from a virtual cloud, like God's finger. But entrance into cyberspace tends to suppress a user's consciousness that the illusion is embedded in the material world, since "given its ideational roots in a mathematical monadology . . . cyberspace lacks a means to analyze the alienation, the ruptures, that it would heal" ("Boundaries" 502). What Markley calls "the enabling myth of cyberspace" is "the desire to master technology so that it can give us forms of power and pleasure that transcend the conditions of their technological production" ("Boundaries" 502-03).

David Porush situates the concept of cyberspace in a long history reaching back beyond the development of writing, seeing it not as a radical break from the past but, in part, as a postmodern attempt "to create a positive alternative to the rational and imperial discourses of science" (540). He examines the persistent "irrational, utopian and metaphysical imaginations" being ascribed the "still-mythical place called cyberspace" (540). Part of the reason it is still mythical, he says, is that the more encompassing claims about cyberspace call for an "irrational technology," one not based on any current mathematics, that can actually connect with the irrational aspects of the mind—not just be a kind of extensive but ultimately rational playground for the mind, based on the binary logic of current circuitry. Since rationality implies correlation to the material world, even one of the main promises of cyberspace is not rational, to fool the brain into thinking that it is experiencing material reality that does not exist.

Porush compares the possible emergence of an irrational technology from our current technology to the accommodations made by Pythagorean mathematics, based on rational numbers, after the discovery of irrational numbers in the fifth century B.C.E. Irrational numbers threatened to destroy the Pythagoreans, a kind of mystical cult whose members believed that mathematics was commensurable with the material world—that all mathematics, the invisible ideal, had physical manifestations, and that to work out proving statements about geometric forms was "a means of communion with God's mind" (Porush 542). Irrational numbers, which weren't commensurate, threatened Pythagorean cosmology. Hippasus, a member

of the Pythagorean Society, was the one who discovered that the square root of two could not be manipulated to express an integer or a ratio of an integer. The story goes that after this discovery, his friends in the society sent him on a sailing voyage, after which he was never seen again.

The person credited with saving the system, Eudoxus of Cnidus, devised "a physical theory of the irrational" that could accommodate irrational numbers by imagining them as points on a line between the points that stood for rational numbers. If rational numbers are evenly spaced on an imaginary line, then irrational numbers are those that fill the spaces in between. Lines and points were accepted abstractions in Pythagorean geometry, but usually numbers were considered precursors to the line. Eudoxus reversed that supposition, adding a layer of abstraction that apparently satisfied those concerned.

According to Porush, the small forays into cyberspace provided through current technology, which is based on rational, binary logic, are somewhat like Eudoxus' solution, to an extent allowing for the irrational through a rational system. For the mind to fully extend through technology into cyberspace, he says, a technology based on an irrational mathematics is needed, one that accommodates human irrationality rather than working reasonably despite it. Porush finds in some postmodern literature and some video games and cybernetic literature what he calls "eudoxical discourse," the linguistic parallel to Eudoxus' invention in mathematics: "satisfactory synthesis between the language of reason and the language of the irrational" (547).

In the work of Gaston Bachelard from the 1930s Porush finds a source of an irrational epistemology he says is now developing in literature, and to some extent in science. "Bachelard's thesis is that the sciences are the source of epistemological innovation, not only in facts but in methods," an innovation that derives "from intuition and induction rather than deterministic positivism, empiricism and deduction" (549). Bachelard associated the irrational with the real. The opposition is between rationality and reality, with rationality finding its expression in science; science simplifies the real and complicates the rational. "Realism means acknowledging the unknowable complexity of natural phenomena—their 'irrationality' including, presumably, their metaphysical properties—unmediated by instrumentalities or theories or models" (549).

According to Porush, models that try to imitate the brain through rational operations simplify the real, complicate the rational and miss the fact that the brain/mind already creates a virtual reality as it encounters the unknowable complexity of natural phenomena. It "takes physical impressions from an irrational, inchoate reality and transmutes

them into thoughts, sensations, and the will to action. . . . [T]he brain . . . is a metaphor machine, operating continuously to carry meaning between realms that are in the largest sense thoroughly incommensurable" (550). This "urge to exteriorize our own neurological drama" is not new, but "can be found in any cultural moment when we confuse the metaphorical with the cognitive, or rather, *the moment when we recognize that the cognitive is the metaphorical*" (551). And that, says Porush, is his definition of transcendence.

Barbara McClintock's mind appears to have been one that carried on an unusual eudoxical discourse within itself, through her ability to understand by literally seeing, at times making sight and insight synonymous. "As if without distinguishing between the two, she knew by seeing and saw by knowing" (Keller 148). McClintock seemed to sharpen both sight and insight with her awareness that not only is the cognitive the metaphorical but insight into a reality is not that reality, a simple but important distinction, one that she thought got lost when scientists regarded symbols they constructed as aspects of reality. She is not unique, but what is so helpful in this case is her reliance on her senses, particularly vision, to understand the workings of a material entity, corn, through a relationship in which she allowed the real, in Bachelard's terms, to encompass the rational—and managed, after 30 years of being misunderstood, to win a Nobel Prize. At least part of her conception of transposition was finally corroborated by those who were led to reconsider her ideas after questions and methods they did understand led to similar conclusions.³

Fox Keller characterizes the 30 years of failure in communication as a gap that was unbridgeable in the 1950s and 60s. McClintock's methods as well as the implications of her findings were not translatable into the conceptual framework of the time, especially since her articles were hard to follow, even for those in her field. McClintock combined a passion for detail with a commitment to understanding a whole organism in relation to its history and environment. For her, the smallest detail provided keys to the larger whole, an approach increasingly out of step with experimental microbiology. Yet she was a believer in the experimental method, who once analogized the brain to a computer and who, ironically, considered her body a kind of nuisance she had to drag around—ironic, since she was also a deeply intuitive observer who relied on her senses. She rejected the label "mystic," yet her insights came in part through her ability not only to form friendshiplike relationships with her objects of study but to dissolve the boundaries between seeing

and envisioning, self and other, to the point that at times her concentration was so great, she forgot her own name.

McClintock's experience investigating the chromosomes of a type of mold, *neurospora*, suggests why others with a less strong connection between sight and insight could find her reasoning hard to follow. In a story reminiscent of both Newton and the Buddha, McClintock sat under a eucalyptus tree in quiet reflection one day when she was troubled by her inability to detect the chromosomes of *neurospora* through a microscope. When she returned to the microscope, she could see the chromosomes (Keller 148). As Keller points out, gaining insight after moments of reflection is not unusual, but altering eyesight is. McClintock remarked that the more she worked with the chromosomes, the bigger they got. "I wasn't outside, I was down there. I was part of the system. . . . I even was able to see the internal parts of the chromosomes. . . . It surprised me because I actually felt as if I were right down there and these were my friends" (117). Later she added, "As you look at these things, they become part of you. And you forget yourself" (117).

Throughout the years, McClintock did train a few others to see what she saw. Following her line of thought, biologist Evelyn Witkin, for instance, came to "actually see the genes turning on and off" (Keller 126, 149). What kept this vision/envisioning from being a consensual hallucination in the cyberspace sense are the standards of proof McClintock was able to meet and her insistence that concepts about reality, even her concepts, are not reality. In her mind a satisfactory synthesis of the irrational and rational produced insights that she expressed in the rational language of science, while allowing for moments when she actually seemed to "embrace the world in its very being, through reason and beyond" (199).

The material and immaterial still function as categories that describe experience, though, like many other people, I think the difference is in context, not in substance. A problem with some stories about cyberspace is not that they erase a definite line between the material and the immaterial, which I don't think exists, but that they seem to draw it more boldly. The more excessive promises about new forms of consciousness (as if all currently available forms have been tried and used up) rely on pretending that the more manifestly immaterial cyberworld can exist independent of its basis in the more manifestly material world of bodies, silicon chips and power plants.

McClintock's emphasis on a relationship with a material entity unprogrammed by humans, which she gained shareable knowledge of through

her senses, in moments of what Porush might call transcendence, leads me to a question asked by others in different contexts. If cyberspace is an idealized space characterized by the illusion that actual materiality is not present (thereby suppressing consciousness of the technology that takes one there), that conceives of the user as a self-creating/self-observing whole, and that provides program-limited manipulation of one's sensory system, what does self-creation in cyberspace do to the ability to know about oneself or the world?

Virginia Woolf's various approaches to reading, writing and reality provide a way of keeping that question an active part of creating a self in cyberspace. Woolf had a lot to say about reality, often stressing the impossibility and undesirability of trying to nail it down, while not abandoning the concept that there is such a thing as reality outside the consensual clichés of human consciousness. What follows here just touches the surface of the ways that Woolf's work addresses two concerns of *Configuration's* cybercritics. The first is Markley's concern about staying awake to the contrivances of cyberspace. As he emphasizes in his summary of conclusions made by *Configurations* contributors Porush and Kathleen Hayles, "This recognition that cyberspace is a fiction—a narrative that creates a coherence it would like to imagine 'really' exists—is crucial to any theoretically sophisticated critique of the limitations of this consensual hallucination and the discontents it imperfectly masks" ("Introduction" 435). The second (or maybe second and third) elaborates on Porush's contentions that in making sense out of inchoate reality, the mind already creates a kind of virtual world and that cyberspace does not make a radical break from the past but, in part, is a postmodern attempt "to create a positive alternative to the rational and imperial discourses of science" (540).

For the first concern, I call on Pamela Caughie's work on Woolf as a critic. Many of Woolf's fictional works require a reader to remain conscious of how a piece of writing and a mind make meaning together, reiterating her critical works' advocacy of active reading. For the second concern, I turn to Gillian Beer's reading of *To the Lighthouse* as a novel in which "the fictitiousness of the separation between object and subject . . . is passionately explored" (30).

In *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*, Caughie asks a question Woolf's writing elicits, a more conceptual version of the table in the pear tree. "Reality, Woolf would show us, is that which obtains between consenting adults in a particular discursive situation. Therefore she asks us what we are consenting to and how our consent is achieved" (176). Lest anyone read this as a statement of relativism, Caughie adds in a note that

"this is not to say that language constitutes the world or that there is nothing outside the text. Rather, it is to say we can engage with and negotiate our world only by means of a particular discourse" (191).

Woolf's critical essays, according to Caughie, emphasize the function a text has for a reader, analyzing the changing relationships among the world, text and readers, and emphasizing the instability of each of those terms. She cites Woolf in "Phases of Fiction" on the inadequacy of basing literary criticism on a fixed notion of art or life. As Woolf put it:

But any such verdict must be based upon the supposition that "the novel" has a certain character which is now fixed and cannot be altered, that "life" has a certain limit which can be defined. And it is precisely this conclusion that the novels we have been reading tend to upset. ("Phases" 144)

Woolf, says Caughie, "is less concerned with the relation of the fiction to the actual world or the writer or the reader than with the kinds of reality established through the fiction" (174-75). In "Phases of Fiction" Woolf asks readers to compare how the different realities of various narratives are constructed, to avoid the extremes of "some normative or ideal standard for criticism on one hand and reducing criticism to uncontrolled relativism on the other" (Caughie 176).

Woolf saw several advantages to her approach. One was that readers' lives would change if they approached fiction awake to its devices; and, as Caughie points out, Woolf valued change. The reader becomes better able to see "relations and subtleties which have not been explored" (Woolf, "Phases" 145). Most important, in Caughie's view,

is that the mimetic relation between life and text, where "novel and life are laid side by side," is only one possible relation in fiction, not the defining one. . . . To change our ways of talking about the novel is to change our ways of conceiving the world. And the "prime distinction" Woolf brings out in her different phases of fiction lies in "the changed attitude toward reality." (Caughie 177)

By grounding critical reading in "changing purposes and shared activity . . . [Woolf] discloses her aims and her methods to remind us that the knowledge we gain and the pleasure we take in reading are bound up with our motives, methods and interests" (181). This method of reading takes us back to Markley's request to question the values and assumptions of virtual technologies by investigating their real-world contexts. The relation between the user of a technology and the world

being created through it calls for a recognition of our "motives, methods and interests," as well as a consciousness of "changing purposes and shared activity."

To the Lighthouse foregrounds this interpretive process by making the narrative's binding thread the motives, methods and interests of the artist, Lily Briscoe. Lily spends two summers, ten years apart, as a guest at the Ramsay family's summer home in the Hebrides, where she paints while brooding over problems of representation. According to Gillian Beer, *To the Lighthouse* is Woolf's only novel in which "the power of philosophical thinking and its limitations [is] openly a theme" (31). Beer calls *To the Lighthouse* a "post-symbolist novel" because it both uses and questions symbolism and because "there is a constant unrest about the search after a permanence which places humanity at the center" (41). Lily Briscoe and the narrative contend with the separation of subject and object and the nature of reality within a kind of elegy in which Woolf wanted to both "honour her obligations to family history and yet freely dispose of that history" (30). As an elegy, which lets go of the past by turning it into language, the novel "brings into question our reliance on symbols to confer value" (30).

The Ramsay family is loosely based on Woolf's own—an intelligent, self-sacrificing and secretly but deeply pessimistic woman married to a moody, demanding, intellectual patriarch, and their many children. In the first section, the family and assorted guests, including Lily, spend their last summer at the home before World War One. The second section is an extraordinary description of the house as it deteriorates in the ten years the Ramsays are away. In the last section, Mr. Ramsay, two resentful teenage children, Lily and a few others return, all of them disoriented by the death of Mrs. Ramsay, mentioned parenthetically in the second section. Although the narrative voice floats in and out of characters' minds, Lily, with her painting and her yearning for a deep connection with both the live and the dead Mrs. Ramsay, is the novel's anchor.

Beer reads Lily's process as Woolf's "meditation" on her father's interpretation of philosopher David Hume. Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, is the model for the novel's Mr. Ramsay, a philosopher constantly tortured by the passing of time and the problem of representing reality when, as Hume put it "'a substance is entirely different from a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of substance'" (qtd. in Beer 37). Beer points out that while Lily's mind at times tends to turn the general (a table) into the particular and substantial (the kitchen table upside down in a pear tree), the process of the picture she paints of Mrs. Ramsay and her youngest child moves toward abstraction. As Lily's painting becomes more abstract, the narrative, according to Beer, "does move away from the burdened authority of symbolic objects" (38).

That move away (Woolf's fiction rarely "progresses" and all resolutions are impermanent) approaches a problem posed by Hume, who saw "the attempt to escape from the self into a wider world to free ourselves of perceptual constraints as inevitably doomed" (Beer 38), a problem that cyberspace promises to banish. Woolf makes no such promises, but in the second section of the novel, "Time Passes," she plays with the problem. "Time Passes" describes the material world of the Ramsays' deteriorating summer house through "a kind of writing which obliterates any suggestion of a single perceiver. Language draws attention to its own anthropomorphism, its habit of remaking objects in the image of human perception . . ." (Beer 39). "Time Passes" sees "the object through time" using "a discourse which points to human absence" (Beer 42), an approach Woolf used to different effects in later novels in her attempt to explore what she called a world without a self.

If all this sounds technical and bloodless, *To the Lighthouse* depends on the language of physical sensation to evoke in the reader a sense not only of time passing in a world without humans but also of grief, ecstasy, longing and other emotions as almost natural forces that blow through and around the characters. These forces swirl together particularly in Lily's grief and driving creativity as she experiences the novel's questioning "of all . . . attempts to propose a stable accord between inner and outer, past and present, to seal the contradiction of subject and object through symbols" (Beer 42). Lily's process also allows a reader in the right frame of mind to experience as well as read about the instability of subject, object and symbol in response to Woolf's evocative descriptions of physical objects, states of mind, internal visions and the relations among them, meeting those "tougher demands on intersubjectivity" required of art and science (Keller 150).

Even if a reader's capacity for empathetic dissolution of the self is lacking, the logic of Lily's (and Woolf's) art can be followed. Before having her most intense experience of the cognitive as the metaphorical, which comes in part three of the novel, Lily muses as she paints: "One wanted, she thought . . . to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy" (300). Painting provides this experience as Lily seesaws between subject and object, present and past, the transcendent and the ordinary, until these terms hold little meaning. This process, which takes pages, is expressed in language similar to that which McClintock would use years later to describe her sojourn among chromosomes, including a sense of bodilessness and loss of identity.

While still painting, Lily sees the long-dead Mrs. Ramsay sitting and knitting. Mrs. Ramsay literally casts a shadow and her presence

evokes a terrible longing in Lily that, under the power of that presence, "became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table" (300). The ordinary becomes a miracle and the visionary becomes ordinary. At the end of the novel, Lily finishes her painting with a somewhat abstract stroke that seems to unify its shapes and colors so that she can say "I have had my vision" (310). The rest of the novel strongly suggests that this vision is not final or all-revealing or even in the painting itself, though the physical fact of the completed painting seems as important as the process. As Lily gazes at the vision of Mrs. Ramsay and finishes her painting, she temporarily awakens a self rooted in being alive to what "is"—physical world, internal visions and external visions. In a sense, she gains her insight *through* "the mind's inevitably neurotic relationship to the body" (Porush 553) rather than despite it.

Although one can be alive to what virtually is by temporarily forgetting what really is (and it may be "a mark of the finest minds to do so"), a question still arises that I can answer but am glad I cannot relinquish: Why bother plugging in, when actual contact with the actual world in its seemingly unbounded extensiveness promises so much more, without the extra layer of dreaming and forgetfulness that cyberspace encourages? Several novels and films have dramatized the dangers of getting lost in computer-generated virtual worlds, which always seem to have some diabolical purpose unknown at first to the enchanted main characters. Getting out with a real (albeit fictionalized) body in one piece takes enormous amounts of willpower as well as fictional gallons of real and virtual blood. I suggest that the chances of navigating cyberspace with a real, wakeful mind can be made greater by contemplating the paths through various worlds taken by Virginia Woolf and Barbara McClintock.

Notes

¹ The term "cyberspace" is based on "cybernetics," coined in 1943 by Norbert Wiener to mean the study of biological and artificial control systems, particularly of how systems regulate themselves.

² Among those cited by Markley and Porush as having excessive expectations are Michael Benedikt, Marcus Novak, Meredith and William Bricken, Howard Reingold, Larry McCaffery, Benjamin Woolley. Porush also cites himself.

³ Transposition's relation to cybernetics, an ironic subtext here, is a paper waiting to be written.

As I was finishing this paper, I came across three Gary Larson cartoons that could have saved me 3,000 words. In one, mathematicians have filled a board with an equation in which a mass of terms on the left equals zero. "No doubt about it, Ellington," the caption reads, "we've mathematically expressed the purpose of the universe. God, how I love the thrill of scientific discovery!" In the next, a scientist is addressed by one of his experiments, a man's head in a bottle, connected to tubes and a computer. "Oh, professor," says the head, "did I tell you I had another out-of-head experience last night?" The best is a triptych of another head in a lab, this one without a bottle but connected to a computer. After the head awakens and screams, "Oh, my God, Professor Higgins! Where's my body?" the professor slaps it. Looking relieved, the head says, "Thanks . . . I needed that."

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The Death of Chekhov

BY PETER FILKINS

When Chekhov knew there was no longer any hope, his body shot, his lungs reduced to bloody rags, he cried "*Ich sterbe!*" to his German doctor, who did the only sensible thing he could think of

and ordered champagne. Slowly the glass emptied, Olga looking on. A large black-winged moth battered a smoky lampshade, the evening sultry in Badenweiler, yet another spa promising cure.

"It's been so long since I've had champagne," whispered Chekhov as the moth slid out a window, another bottle popped its cork, and the great writer turned on his side and soon ceased breathing.

"There were no human voices, no everyday sounds. There was only beauty, peace, the grandeur of death," Olga later reported, sitting up the whole night through to study her husband's face, now serene and knowing.

Later that day the usual arrangements were made, the body transported by train back to Moscow, a huge crowd there to greet it, a dirty green van marked "Oysters" having brought it from the station.

Which is to say nothing of Gorky's sense of outrage at such vulgarity, or that the crowd mistakenly followed the coffin of a General Keller, killed in Manchuria, thinking a military band seemed right for the occasion,

as two lawyers debated the intelligence of their dogs, a woman with a parasol smiled at the constable, and Chekhov's mother pronounced his only eulogy: "What a calamity has struck us. Antosha is no more "

Ed's Barn

BY CYNTHIA RICHARDSON

The field across the road,
The tall pines at its crest,
The distant sky mercurial,
And Ed's old barn
Were fixtures in the landscape
Of all my middle years.

The barn decayed at glacial pace.
A board pulled loose one year,
And honeysuckle scaled the walls
Which then began to lean and cant.
A tired door escaped its hinge
And foxes burrowed under beams.

Each little change provoked a little shock,
But soon the slightly altered barn
Became the norm, as last year's
Barn became to last year's me.

The barn collapsed one winter night.
A snow too many got it down.
I feared its different silhouette,
Its store of rotten hay exposed.
But soon the ruined barn became
My lodestar fixed and true.

The night it burned, I watched
The fire through the chilly pane
And saw my face in flames.

The Smooth-Flowing Cursive Forms of Childhood

BY ROSEMARY STARACE

The big blue ball is a big blue "O."
The big blue ball is a big blue "O."

These are the words
that came into the child's mind
upon waking—
when the doorknobs and dressers and her dear toys
began whispering in the failing darkness,
making themselves again distinct from night;
when the ball,
new and so impossibly big
and flat
in the half-light,
yet somehow aglow,
commanded her sleepy vision.

It was as big as a world, she knew.
A ball as big as the world,
an "O" as big as the world.
She understood that she could hug an "O" like that,
wrap her body around it
so completely
that her hands could meet her feet;
yes, the ball would fill her so completely
that she, too, would become a sphere, a circle, an "O."

And out of this swelling feeling,
she began to make other small round shapes
with her fingers and her hands,

little "O" children bouncing and prancing
on the pillows,
sporting with each other—
Then, by some exuberant, if small, miracle
(which she would never question),
her knowledge formed itself into a sound—
a sound so round,
so eager to be spoken and admired,
so proud,
that, like a ping-pong ball,
it popped right out of her mouth:
"Oh!"

Now the sun was peeking in,
cue for mommy-dear,
who, each day, would arrive quietly
and peer around the door frame,
revealing first her eyes,
then her smile,
and finally her whole self with arms outstretched
like beams of light.

"Time to get up, sweetheart!"

And there would be a big round hug
(like two links joining in a chain),
and a promise of Cheerios
or pancakes.

Reading a 15th-Century English Woman's Life:

The Character of Margaret Paston As Revealed Through Her Letters

BY ROSANNE FLESZAR DENHARD

The character of Margaret Mautby Paston (d. 1484) of Norfolk, as presented through her substantial surviving correspondence of 1441 to 1482, is voiced primarily through her many letters to her husband and children.¹ The letters to Margaret Paston from her husband, John Paston I (1421–1466), also imply a good deal about Margaret's character (and John's perception of it), as do the letters from others. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus, writing on the epistolary genre, observe that "what emerges more clearly and consistently from letters than from any other genre employed by medieval women is the writer's sense of her own authority" (15), and it is mainly through her own strong voice that Margaret Paston reveals her character.² As Joan M. Ferrante notes, through medieval women's letters we encounter writers "aware of themselves as women," writing their own lives, "at the center of public life" (3). I maintain that, whether "public" or "private," what is vital is that through letters we gain access to the writer's life in a way that is both authentic self-revelation and an illumination of the larger society.

Because her correspondence covers such a broad period, depicting the life of this late-medieval woman from the year after her marriage in 1440—probably at the age of 18 (Richmond 120)—to two years before her death in 1484, the 104 surviving letters by Margaret Paston and the many surviving letters that she received not only provide a view of the external details of her life but also furnish substantial insights into the nature of Margaret Paston herself.³ Additionally, Margaret's correspondence serves to illuminate the lives of other, mostly anonymous, late-medieval English women of the gentry, whose lives were almost certainly in many respects similar to her own. To set in perspective for late-20th-century readers just what these 104 surviving letters by a 15th-century English woman mean in terms of their potential to reveal the character and life of their writer, one has only to realize that the surviving correspondence of no other English woman of the period even begins to approach the volume of extant personal writing that survives by Margaret Paston (Watt 122, 136–37).

In reading Margaret Paston's letters like an epistolary novel, I am struck by the realization of both similarities to and differences from the letters of fiction. The first distinction, obviously, is that the letters of Margaret Paston are "real," whereas the letters of an epistolary novel are merely "realistic." The second major difference between the Pastons' actual correspondence and the imaginary letters of fiction—and the biggest challenge to the reading of the Paston letters as literature—is the randomness of the correspondence. The reader of the Paston letters has only what survives of all that was originally written, and what was written came not from a desire to create a literary work using the letter form but from a need to communicate through letters. In addition, as Norman Davis points out, much of the correspondence was certainly lost over the years (xxvi), so in spite of the extensive nature of Margaret Paston's surviving correspondence and the volume of the entire Paston correspondence, which totals more than 900 letters and documents, what remains is still fragmentary, in a sense unfinished.

Because of both the nature of the letters and their randomness, Margaret Paston reveals herself (and is depicted by others) almost inadvertently, again in contrast to the depiction of character in a true epistolary novel or, for that matter, in any work of "imaginative" literature. Margaret's letters provide not the exaggeration and elaboration of an imaginative work but, rather, the commonplace reality of the lives of the English gentry during the 15th century. It is, however, precisely this quality of the everyday that makes these letters so revealing, particularly since Margaret's correspondence is personal rather than ceremonial in nature.

Margaret primarily addressed her letters to her husband and two eldest sons and in these letters shares her concerns with the management, in both the business and the personal sense, of Paston interests. Similarly, the letters addressed to her are for the most part from either close relatives or family business agents. We have everywhere in the correspondence the "real" Margaret Paston, even as she assiduously follows custom and etiquette, as in her use of the common form of formal address. Most of the letters, from Margaret and her correspondents, merge business with family in a way that reveals much about the integration of 15th-century manorial life on all levels and attests to the active role Margaret Paston played in business affairs at the same time that she was occupied in caring for her family in what a modern reader might term more traditionally domestic ways. P. J. P. Goldberg has written of the "work identity" of late-medieval women as being particularly "fluid" for women of all classes, both at home and in business (which were usually in the same place or places) (116), as did earlier historians such as Eileen Power. We see just such a fluidity in Margaret Paston's own life and work and daily concerns expressed through her correspondence.

What fascinates me is that this is a case of social reality presented in the writing that seems to at least in some regards subvert the stated doctrinal order of the male/female hierarchy favored by the dominant powers of Church and law. As Power points out, "The position of women is often considered as a test by which the civilisation of a country or age may be judged" (9). Acknowledging the complexity of defining precisely what is the "position of women" for any time and place, Power notes that "the position of women is one thing in theory, another in legal position, yet another in everyday life. . . . The true position of women was a blend of all the three" (9). I would emend Power's term "theory" to include the arts, in this case, the imaginative literary representation of women by both themselves and, far more commonly in the Middle Ages, male writers. It is precisely this intersection of women in theory and women in practice, to use Power's terms (43), that interests me. As she maintains, we must observe medieval women "as revealed to us not in romances but in records" if we are to assess their true position within the household (41), and, I would add, within the larger society.

The reader must keep in mind that the exploration and revelation of her feelings was rarely Margaret Paston's intention in her letters (except, perhaps, when she wrote earnestly to her husband or children of intimate family issues, and even in the majority of these letters she often focuses alternately on personal and business matters). Most of

the time, Margaret's letters deal pragmatically and calmly with myriad household issues ranging from ordinary to downright alarming, and this in itself reveals a great deal about the woman and her personal response to the time in which she lived. The term "household" for the Pastons actually meant several houses, farms and landholdings—including Margaret's own properties from her inheritance as sole heir of her father's substantial estates.

In a letter of 1448, written when Margaret, then a mother in her 20s, was in charge of her family's estate at Gresham while her husband was occupied at other family holdings, she tells her husband of preparing for a possible attack by forces of one of the family's enemies, Lord Moleyns, and his bailiff, Partridge. She writes:

Ryt wurchipful husband, I recomaund me to you and prey you to gete som crosse bows, and windlasses to bynd them wyth. . . . For your houses here ben so low that there may no man shoot out wyth a long bow, though we hadde so much need. . . . And also I would thee should get two or three short pole-axes to keep wyth[in] doors. . . .

Partryche and his fellowship are sore afraid that thee would enter again up-on them, and they have made great ordinance wyth-inne the house, as it is told me. They have made bars to bar the doors cross-wise, and they have made wickets on every quarter of the house to shoot out of, both wyth bows and with hand guns. . . . (no. 130)

From her request for arms and fortifications for the house and her description of fortifications that Partridge has made on their enemy stronghold, Margaret shifts in the same letter to other needs:

I prey that ye will vouche-safe to buy for me one pound of almonds and one pound of sugyre, and that ye will buy some frieze-cloth to make your children's gowns; ye shall have the best cheap and best choice of Hay's wife, as it is told me. And that would ye buy a yard of broadcloth of black for a hood for me . . . for there is no other good cloth nor good frieze in this town. As for the children's gowns, when I have cloth I shall make them. The Trinity have you in his keeping and send you good speed in all your matters. (no. 130)

The juxtaposition of weapons with yardgoods in the above letter reveals a great deal about both the character of Margaret (in her matter-of-fact way of relating both her needs and the situation) and the

demands placed upon her. Far from being unusual, the situation Margaret Paston confronted while in charge of the property at Gresham was a fairly typical one for married women of the landed gentry during the 15th century. Indeed, through the span of the Middle Ages, letters provide historical documentation of women in positions of power regardless of the many obstacles posed by male Church and male legal communities (Ferrante *Glory* 3–10).

The cultural historian David Herlihy observes that “limited information has allowed the field of household history to become overgrown with many dubious assertions concerning the Middle Ages. The medieval family has become the negative stereotype against which later families are compared, in order to show the alleged benefits of modernization” (112). Since both Church and secular law promoted an “ideal” that was sometimes to the detriment of real women’s lives, and generally omitted any account of the actual living of those lives, it is not difficult to comprehend how evidence of the official—and at times misogynistic—views promoted by Church and law could lean toward a modern interpretation that the subordination and demeaning of women was a medieval constant. But the records of actual lives and some of the teaching treatises by and for women (as well as some of those by and for men) prove otherwise. Herlihy writes that marriage was “rehabilitated” in the 15th century (117), noting a steady increase in women’s opportunities, influence and power during the Middle Ages. Ferrante, echoing Power’s earlier work on women landowners, both married and single (Power 38–42), supports this interpretation, maintaining that the letters written by women during the Middle Ages attest to the facts that “women’s authority, political and intellectual, is recognized by the men who work with them, that women collaborate with men in politics, religion and scholarship as colleagues, that their friendship and support is valued and trusted” (*Glory* 10).

This exercise of womanly authority in collaboration with men is compellingly present in Margaret Paston’s life as revealed through the Paston correspondence. Margaret’s relations with her husband and seven children, bailiff, business associates, tenants and enemies all show a decisive, clear-thinking and courageous woman who was a true partner to her husband while looking after their mutual interests and maintaining an absolute loyalty to him that conforms to the ideals of the period. John Paston at times addressed his wife alone in letters focused on important business and at other times addressed a team of trusted people headed by Margaret. A letter from John I to Margaret in 1460 is typical in its matter and tone, keeping Margaret informed of current

business and trusting her to do her part:

I recomaunde me to you, letyng you know that I sent a letter to John Russe and Richard Kalle [the longtime family bailiff, whose name is usually spelled Calle, who in 1469 married the Pastons' daughter Margery] that they . . . shuld send me word of whom alle the manors, lands, and tenementes that wer Sir John Fastolffes [John Paston I was legal advisor to Sir John Fastolf, a relative of Margaret's, and served as an executer of his highly contested estate] wern holde, praying you that ye wole do them spede them in that matter. And if my papers which lie in . . . my great chest may contain anything helpful there-in, let them see it . . . I prey you recomaunde me to my mother. . . . (no. 55)

Similar letters (e.g., no. 75) are addressed individually to Margaret or jointly to her, Richard Calle and one or more additional family estate agents, and these reinforce the importance of Margaret Paston's role as a coordinator of the often complicated process of gathering information and looking out for the family's land and financial interests.

Since John was often traveling between one landholding and another, and during some periods frequently in London on legal business, Margaret generally stayed in residence at one place longer than he and took full responsibility for affairs there and at nearby holdings, though she was always careful to keep her husband informed of her doings:

Ryt wyrshypful husbond. . . . Pleased you to know that I have spoken thys week wyth diverse of your tenents of Drayton and put them in comfort that all shall be well hereafter, by the grace of God; and I feel well by them that they will be ryght glad to have again their olde master, and so wold they all except one or two that be false shrews.

And thys next week I purpose on Wensday or Thursday to be at Haylesdon and to abide there a week or two and send oure men about to gather [rent] money at Drayton before I come thence. I pray you send me word how ye will that I do there-in. . . . (no. 179)

John, in turn, showed a great deal of respect for Margaret's management skills and judgment. Perhaps even more significantly, he recognized her role as a matter of course, writing, "Ye be a gentilwoman, and it is fitting for yow to comfort yowr tenants . . ." (no. 73).

As noted earlier, Margaret Paston and her household were some-

times in considerable danger during the troubled period of political conflict between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians and their various subfactions. She indicates through her letters a willingness to take on a proactive role in the family's best interests, and John's praise in his letters to her underscores his admiration of her actions. On July 12, 1465, Margaret writes to her husband regarding their dispute with the Duke of Suffolk concerning the manors of Drayton and Hellesdon:

Ryght worshypful husbond, I recomaund me to yow, preyeng you heartily that ye wyl seek a means that yowre servants may be in peace, for they be dayly in fear of their lives. The Duke of Suffolk's men thretyn dayly Daubney, Wykys, and Richard Calle that where so ever they may gete them they schold die. And threats have been made on Rychard Calle this week, so that he was in gret jeopardy at Norwych among them. And gret threats have been made upon me and My felashep here on Monday last passyd. . . . I suppose there shall be gret labor against yow and yowre servauntys at the assizes and sessions here, and wherefore it semeth to me, saving yowre better advyce, it were well do that ye shold speke wyth the justices before they come here. And if ye will that I complain to them or to any othere, if God fortune me lyfe and helth I wol do as ye advyse me to do, for in good feyth I have been simply entreated amonge them. And what wyth syknesse and troble that I am brought ryght low and weak, but to my powere I wyl do as I can or may in yowre matters. . . . (no. 188)

In the above excerpt we observe Margaret's courage and determination to speak out for Paston interests and her willingness to make suggestions to her husband on what course to take ("it were well do that ye shold speke wyth the justices before they come here"), as well as her deference to her husband's wishes. As John makes clear in a letter to his wife that soon follows, he admires and respects her work and is also concerned for her well-being during this time of stress:

I recummand me to yow and thank yow of yowr labour and business with the unruly fellowship that came before yow on Monday last past, whereof I heard report by John Hobbs; and in good faith ye acquit yow right wel and discretly, and heartily to yowr worship and myn and to the shame of yowr adversaries. And I am wel content that ye avowed that ye kept possession at Drayton, and so wold do; wherfor I pray yow make yowr word good if ye may, and at the least let myn adversaries not have it

in peace if ye may. John Hobbs telleth me that ye be sickly, which me liketh not to hear, praying you earnestly that ye take what may do yow ease and spare not, and in any wyse take no thought nor too much labor for these matters, nor set it so to yowr heart hat ye fare the worse for it. And as for the matter, so they overcame you not with force nor boasting, I shall have the manor more surely to me and myn than the Duke shall have Cossey, doubt ye not. . . . (no. 74)

In a long letter written to Margaret, Richard Calle and another family retainer, John Paston I presents a detailed view of his complex business matters. Written January 15, 1465—the year before John’s death—this letter is another that emphasizes the position of partnership and trust that Margaret held in the marriage. Things were not going well for the family during this period of the 1460s and John I had serious concerns for the Paston interests, which he voices in a letter of criticism and advice, firmly laying out responsibilities and guidelines for Margaret and the family agents (no. 72). This long letter is full of intricate business details and its tone is grim, both in the lengthier business segments and in the portion devoted to John’s thoughts on his problematic relationship with son John Paston II, then 23, who had been knighted two years before but was still in his father’s eyes a rebellious child.

The Italian-French writer Christine de Pisan (1365–c. 1430) addressed her treatise *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues* to all “ladies” and “women” of the medieval hierarchy, from highest to lowest. While the work is clearly intended to give moral instruction, the blending of the spiritual with the pragmatic is characteristically medieval. It is therefore perfectly appropriate for a writer to be, as was Christine, concerned with emphasizing to women both the primacy of Christian love and the importance of being astute in the business skills necessary for the management of a family. In writing to her female contemporaries, Christine de Pisan was providing instruction on how to live a good life as a woman within the complex framework of late-medieval society. Her work provides a sort of literary bridge between the theoretical and the practical, and one can view the real-life character of Margaret Paston as largely an embodiment of this teaching.

So, too, in the work termed the first autobiography in English, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery (c. 1373–c. 1440) portrays herself as a woman of both spiritual and earthly concerns, in this case concerns that frequently compete. Margery Kempe’s text provides yet another invaluable view of a real 15th-century woman, one who managed a large family and business and financial matters while actively seeking a

more spiritually fulfilling life and a forum for her religious mysticism.

While Margaret Paston only rarely refers overtly to spiritual matters in her letters, there is evidence that she was truly devout. Like most letter writers of her time, she closes all but the most urgent of her letters to family members with one or more blessings, frequently the conventional "The Holy Trinyty have you in His kepyng" or something very similar. At other times, however, Margaret elaborates upon her blessings, turning them into something more personally revealing of her concerns at the time of writing. Perhaps most striking is the following, which ends a letter written to John I in 1461:

God in hys mercy send us a good world, and send you health in
body and soul and good speed in all your matters. (no. 160)

Many years earlier, in 1448, Margaret earnestly advised her husband on spiritual matters as only a trusted wife and partner could:

I pray you heartily hear mass and other services that ye are
bound to hear with a devout heart, and I hope verily that ye
shal speed right wele in all your matters, by the grace of God.
Trust verily in God and obey hym and serve hym, and he wyl
not desert thee. (no. 129)

Margaret Paston's concern for her husband—as well as her frank sharing of advice both moral and practical with him throughout their 25-year marriage—is evidenced through this and the many other letters that she wrote to him. In letter number 129 Margaret also reveals herself following the advice of Christine de Pisan, who counseled women to intervene, if necessary, in their husbands' spiritual lives, though tellingly—and probably pragmatically—Christine suggests that the wife's approach to influencing her husband's spiritual life should be through building a good relationship with his confessor and asking him to intervene with the husband on matters of concern (63). Margaret Paston's approach to her husband's spiritual well-being, as evidenced in the above letter, was more direct.

Margaret often interceded for other family members in bringing matters to the attention of her husband, showing a sincere concern for the happiness and harmony of her large family. John I's younger sister Elizabeth, though willing to marry and not without suitors, remained unmarried until around the age of 30, at least partly because of the reluctance of her mother and her brother John I, who was since his father's death in 1444 the head of the family, to settle on any but the most financially beneficial marriage contract for Elizabeth (Richmond

177–81). Precisely how influential Margaret Paston was in helping to bring this situation to a positive resolution is unknown because of gaps in the correspondence; but it is clear that Elizabeth herself and also her brother William regarded their sister-in-law as a sympathetic and powerfully persuasive ally. In a letter to John I that is possibly from 1453 (no. 145), Margaret informs him of the conflicts between Elizabeth and her mother and conveys a plea from Elizabeth:

I recommaund me to yow, praying yow to know that I spak yistirday wyth my sister. . . . And she desyrith, if it pleased yow, that ye shuld give the gentleman that ye know of such language as he myght feel by yow that ye will be well willyng to the matter that ye know of. . . . Wherefore she prayeth yow that ye will be her good brothere, and that ye myght have a full answer at this time whether it shall be ya or nay. (no. 145)

Several years later, probably in 1458, Elizabeth and John I's brother William wrote to his sister-in-law Margaret to say that this time Elizabeth really seemed to be "upon point of marriage," adding, "I pray you do your part to call there-on. . . . I know right well your good labore may do much; and send me word how you hear as hastily as ye may" (no. 85). Elizabeth Paston did indeed marry Robert Poynings late in 1458. It is worth noting that Christine de Pisan, in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, stresses the importance of undertaking precisely such types of familial mediation as part of the duty of the wellborn woman:

If she values her honour, she will love and honour the relatives of her husband and show it in the following ways. . . . She will intervene on their behalf with her husband if the need arises, and if there should be any dispute between them she will do her utmost to make peace. (65–66)

Margaret Paston also reveals her willingness to take part in aiding others in her actions as advocate for people outside her family. The Paston correspondence of the summer of 1461 relates the story of the political murder of Thomas Denys. In a letter to her husband of July 9 of that summer, Margaret expresses her particular concern for the plight of Denys' widow, who was herself in danger, and asks John I to find a way to help this woman obtain her rightful property and safety:

Please yow to know that I have spoke with Thomas Denys' wife, and she recommands herself to your good mastership and that ye will give her your advice how to act for her person and her goods; for regarding her own self she dare not go home

to her owne place, for she is threatened that if she be taken she myght be slayne or be put in a fearful place in shortening of her life, and so she standeth in great heaviness, God her help. (no. 160)

Margaret further explains to her husband that she has already consulted another person familiar with the Denys family's plight for advice on how Mrs. Denys should proceed, and informs him that she has lent Mrs. Denys money. Margaret then shifts to her concern for the safety of her husband and herself, writing, "At the reveraunce of God be warey how ye ride or go, for [fear of] . . . evil-disposed fellowships. I am put in fear dayly for my abiding here and counseled by my mother and by other good friends that I shuld not abide here" (no. 160). In spite of her own fears for self and family, Margaret shows a sense of empathy and sisterhood for another woman who is at that moment more in need than herself, illustrating in this episode qualities that Ferrante observes as being defining characteristics of much of the correspondence of medieval women (*Glory* 3–4, 11). Margaret's desire to help this vulnerable widow is also a real-life embodiment of the concern with women helping women that is one of the themes of Christine de Pisan's *Treasure of the City of Ladies*.

Perhaps the most difficult mediation that Margaret Paston ever undertook was between her own son John II (1442–1479)—by this time Sir John—and his father. Numerous letters among all three people trace the tension between Sir John and his father and Margaret's efforts toward a lasting reconciliation between them. In a letter of November 15, 1463, Margaret writes to her son:

. . . Youre father thought, and thynketh yet, that I was agreed to your departyng, and that hathe caused me to have gret hevinessse. I hope he wolle be youre good father her-after if you behave yourself well and do as you owe to him. And I charge you upon my blessing that in anythyng touching your father that should be his worship, profyte, or avayle that ye do your duty and diligent labore, as you wish to have my good wille; and that shalle cause youre father to be a better father to you. (no. 175)

In letter number 175 Margaret further suggests to her son that he write again to his father, who had ignored his son's first letter to him, "as lowly as ye can, beseeching hym to be your good father. . . . I trust ye shall fynd it most beneficial to you," adding that she would like her son to write to her again soon to keep her informed. In a letter written a few months

later, a very respectful and conciliatory Sir John addresses his father (no. 234), but we do not have any of his letters to his mother from this period; only hers to him survive.

Margaret also writes to her husband, reminding him of his duties as a father and asking him to forgive their son and acknowledge him with fatherly respect for his abilities and to send him on an important mission, letting her husband know that it is also the opinion of family friends that young Sir John should be so recognized by his father (no. 176). Two years later, in 1465, Margaret again urges her husband to rethink his harshness toward their eldest son, who has once again displeased his father, writing, "For God's sake, sir, have pity on hym and remembre yow it hath been a long season since he had anything of you to help him, and he hath obeyed himself to you and will do at all times, and will do that he can or may to have your good fatherhood. And at the reveraunce of God, be ye hys good father and have a fatherly heart to hym" (no. 178). Margaret also assures her husband that she herself will not tolerate any ill behavior from her son (no. 179); and, interestingly, after John I's death in 1466, it is Margaret who takes on a role similar to her late husband's in letters that are at times critical of her son's undisciplined behavior and lack of seriousness of purpose (e.g., no. 205).

John I finally relented and let Margaret know that it was largely because of her that he forgave the son: "Where ye desire me that I shuld take your son to grace, I will for your sake do the better. . . ." (no. 72), but it is a forgiveness that is nonetheless tempered by the father's unrelenting—and apparently justified—criticism of the son. Although a knight and future head of his family, young Sir John Paston is, according to John I, of "presumptuous and indiscrete demeanor" and an "ill example" to others, including the servants. John I maintains of his son that "I never could feel nor understand hym politic nor diligent in helping himself, but as a drone amonges bees which labor for gathering honey in the fields and the drone does nought but taketh his part of it." The distinct impression is that John I, for the sake of his wife, *wishes* to forgive his son but cannot quite do so (no. 72). As David Herlihy writes in *Medieval Households*, it was typically the role of the wife and mother in a family to serve in the role of "protector and intercessor" for her children, especially in the potentially volatile relationship between aging father and adult sons (120–21), where the economic and land interests of income and inheritance came into play.

Margaret did not, however, always play the peacemaker in matters concerning her children. In the case of her daughter Margery's 1469 marriage, Margaret conducted herself in an utterly conventional and un-

compromising manner. Her sense of social position and family protocol apparently dictated her behavior when Margery announced that she planned to marry family employee Richard Calle, who figures prominently in the Paston family correspondence as an addressee, a clerk writing for family members and author of his own letters.

Margaret was as incensed as the rest of the family by the love match between their 19-year-old Margery and Richard Calle, who was then in his 30s, in spite of the fact that they all knew, liked and respected him. For example, in January 1465 (referred to above), John I addresses a major letter detailing both business and personal matters "To my mistress Margaret Paston and to my well-beloved friends John Daubney and Richard Calle" (no. 72). The marriage did take place, against the wishes of Margery's family, and after a time Margery was apparently at least partially forgiven for her choice. After briefly leaving the Pastons' employ, Calle returned to work for his in-laws for many years, and in her will Margaret remembered the children of Margery (who had by this time died) and Richard (no. 230).

Perhaps revealingly, one of the very few instances of secrecy in family matters—in the sense of a hesitation to say too much in a letter dictated to a clerk—occurs in Margaret Paston's correspondence regarding her daughter Margery prior to her marriage. In a letter from 1469 to her son Sir John, Margaret first addresses candidly her thoughts on the possibility of his marriage to a young woman: "I have no certain knowledge of your engagement, but if ye be engaged I pray God send you joy and worship together . . . and in the sight of God ye are as greatly bound to her as if ye were married. . . . Also I would that ye shuld not be too hasty to be married till ye are more sure of your livelihood, for ye must remember what charge ye shall have. . ." (no. 201). This contrasts considerably with Margaret's reticence to discuss the details of Sir John's sister's situation in the following lines:

Also I wish you shuld purvey for your sister to be wyth my lady of Oxford or with my lady of Bedford or in some other place of good standing where as ye think best, and I will help to her fynding, for we be both of us weary of the other. I shall telle you more when I speke wyth you. I pray you do your duty here as ye will my comfort and weelfare and your worship, for diverse causes which ye shall understand afterward, etc. (no. 201)

It is worth noting that according to medieval canon law, which governed marriage, a binding marriage commitment could be effected by a freely given promise of consent by both parties (provided they were of legal age) followed by consummation (Goldberg 126). Margaret seems

to have the seriousness of this in mind regarding her son's possible betrothal; yet, when the family learned that Margery and Richard Calle had made a binding betrothal promise prior to a formal marriage, the Pastons had the couple brought before the bishop, who questioned them and found their union valid (no. 203). Margaret indicates in her correspondence real grief over this situation. At least from her 15th-century perspective, her daughter was marrying beneath herself and her family and this would bring sorrow (no. 203).

Like most marriages of the landed gentry during the 15th century, and in contrast with the marriage of Margery to the socially "inferior" Richard Calle, the marriage of Margaret Mautby and John Paston was considered an appropriate match in terms of family connections and holdings. The relationship seems to have grown quickly into one grounded in mutual affection as well as mutual business interests. In one of Margaret's first surviving letters to her husband (probably 1441, December 14), she closes with lines referring obliquely to her pregnancy:

I pray you that ye wyl wear the image of Seynt Margret [patron saint of pregnant women] that I sent you for a remembrance tyl ye com home. Ye have lefte me such a remembrance that it makes me thynk upon you both day and night when I ought to sleep. (no. 125)

Throughout their marriage, Margaret and John each expressed concern for the other's welfare as they individually coped with long separations necessitated by business and politics and the complex and frequently dangerous situations they were both so adept at negotiating. At times throughout their marriage, their anxieties, generally kept in the background, would briefly take center stage, as in John's expression of concern for Margaret's well-being during the 1465 dispute over Hellesdon cited above (no. 74) and in this excerpt from a letter from Margaret Paston to John I written in 1443:

I recomande me to yow, desyryng earnestly to hear of your welfare, thanking God of your amending of the grete disease that ye have had; and I thank yow for the letter that ye sent me, for by my troth my mother [-in-law] and I were not in heart's ease from the tyme that we learned of your sickness til we learned surely of your amending. . . . I wish ye were at home, if it were your ease and your sore myght be as well looked after here as it is where ye be now, rather than a new gown, though it be of scarlet. . . . (no. 126)

Twenty-five years after their marriage, in the year before John's sudden death, Margaret and John exchanged letters with very affectionate opening lines after a visit following a long separation that had included for John both illness and imprisonment in London. John addresses his wife with rare courtliness as "myn owne dear sovrein lady," adding, "I recomaund me to yow and thank yow of the great cheer ye made me here" before moving on to more characteristic business and family matters (no. 77). In her reply dated a week later, Margaret returns the compliment graciously before also turning to more pragmatic items of interest:

Ryght worshipful husbonde, I recommend me to yow, desiring sincerely to hear of your welfare, thankyng you of yowr great cheer that ye made me and the cost that ye did on me. Ye spent more than myn will was that ye should do, but that it pleased yow to do so. God give me grace to do that may please yow. (no. 192)

Most of the correspondence between Margaret and John Paston, however, is warm and cordial but does not dwell on their relationship as such.

While a hierarchical structure with the husband in the position of highest authority undoubtedly existed in the marriage of John and Margaret Paston, their correspondence shows it to have been tempered by both reason and mutual respect. If one were to attempt an allegorical reading of this real-life situation, it would be a positive statement on what would have been considered a doctrinally sound marriage. At the same time, what emerges for the modern reader is a view of a marriage, expressed by both wife and husband, that is as "equal" as could be imagined in a society whose guiding force was ostensibly a Church that had little official use for women in positions of authority.

What the letters tell us about Margaret Paston is necessarily an incomplete and at times fragmented story, but nonetheless a complex character does inhabit the correspondence. Part of what makes the character of Margaret Paston so fascinating for the reader is the truth involved in her letters. One has no reason to suspect self-consciousness or hidden motives in Margaret's letters. In a sense, what we have is a character who often seems to be unconsciously revealing herself. Because the letters of Margaret Paston and her correspondents are direct and without artifice (while simultaneously, of course, being precise and circumspect), we can trust these and other purely historical records of the period to convey the truth of the characters' lives and illuminate their cultural milieu without the innate distortion that is implicit in

endeavors of theory, whether religious, political or self-consciously literary. And while the random nature of the letters in terms of content (i.e., Margaret Paston wrote about what she needed to write about at a particular time and not all of that writing survives) makes the "plot" of the Paston letters fragmentary, a basic narrative line does emerge. Reading the character of Margaret Paston as she voices her concerns and experiences through her correspondence we come to know her as a remarkable yet in many senses ordinary 15th-century woman of the English gentry, and through her we read the lives of other, unknown, women who were her contemporaries.

Notes

¹ A note on Margaret Paston's literacy and the education of late-medieval women: Since clerks and secretaries often served as scribes to record the dictated letters and manuscripts of both writers and nonwriters, and because it was more common to know how to read than to be able to read and write, the question of Margaret Paston's literacy is a complicated one. A number of scholars either contradict one another or find the available evidence inconclusive. Norman Davis, on the basis of textual and scribal evidence, maintains that Margaret and the other Paston women correspondents were either nonwriters or only minimally skilled at writing (xxxvii–viii). James Gairdner, the editor of the edition of the Paston correspondence preceding Davis' edition, seems to indicate a tacit acceptance of the ability of Margaret Paston (and the other women of the family) to write. H. S. Bennett states clearly that the Paston women were fully literate, but he acknowledges their frequent use of clerks (116). Eileen Power believes that the Paston women, including Margaret, were able to both read and write (85). Frances and Joseph Gies are uncertain about Margaret Paston's ability to write (212–13). Joan Ferrante, while not writing specifically about the Paston women, makes, in the more recent "The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy," a strong case for her thesis that many women of the nobility and gentry were well educated and recognized for their educational achievement, concurring with Power's much earlier work in "The Education of Medieval Women" (*Medieval Women* 76–88). Philippe Braunstein acknowledges that many women were literate during this period (549). Christine de Pisan writes about the responsibility

of mothers for their children's education (66–68) and stresses that women need to have the skills necessary to supervise their families, households and financial affairs (130–31). Lesley Smith believes that women's literacy rates were higher than previously believed (21). I am convinced that Margaret Paston could indeed read, but I am not necessarily convinced that she could write.

² By "character" I mean (1) the sum of traits and features that constitute the discernible individual nature of a person and (2) a person represented in a written text.

³ A note on the language of Margaret Paston's correspondence: The English of Norfolk during the 15th century still utilized several special letter symbols, surviving from Old English into Middle English. In addition, certain spellings use standard modern letters in ways unfamiliar enough to cause confusion for most general readers. I have therefore taken the liberty of silently adapting some of the spellings of Davis' edition of *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, in which the letters appear in the original Middle English, replacing potentially confusing symbols and letters with their modern English equivalents, in order to clarify meaning for the readers of the present article. I have adapted the spellings only where I perceived a true need, and I have made no attempt to "translate" the cited passages into standard modern English, though I have on occasion substituted or added a modern English word when the original Middle English seemed likely to cause confusion for the general reader.

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Fiction

Appendix Seven

BY ROBERT ABEL

Astonished and confused, Hector Holt sat across from his father in the nursing home. Mark was having one of his rare lucid days and Hector was debating with himself whether it had been a mistake to bring him here, with all that entailed—including the bouts with his father's hatred of nursing homes, and Hector's bouts with his own ideals about the need for a dignified way for the infirm elderly to be guided to a dignified end. Hector should have been glad, he supposed, for his father's relapse into clarity; instead, it was piercing him with guilt.

If Father were still at home, the home would not have been sold to pay for the "geriatric care" he was now receiving at Shining Tides. If Father were still at home, Hector continued to muse, trebling his guilt, would this pale smell of urine be present? Would his father's sparse shock of stark white hair jet out over his ears in mangled fistfuls? That tin chair with the pillow on it—would that be how his father was enthroned? Would he look, in those blue pinstriped pajamas, so much like a patient, or a prisoner?

Hector put the tips of his fingers together and shook them slowly up and down until he achieved the pleasant sensation of a pane of glass between his hands. The illusion was really quite remarkable, sensory magic of a kind. Hector was distracting himself so because Father, in his clarity and after a brief spasm of apparent happiness with Hector's visit,

which was not unusual, had regressed to the old, painful topics of Hector's Big Mistake in Life and the woman who had caused it. Of all the memories Father might have retained about me, Hector thought, why does it have to be this particular loop? We had this argument 30 years ago. But Hector wasn't wasting any time arguing now, when there was absolutely no point to it. He only wished his father would remember other things, more mercifully conceived things, about him, and continued intriguing himself with the sensation of a pane of glass between his fingers.

Mark had fallen into the old loop when, out of the seeming blue, he had asked, "That Vietnamese girl who ruined your life, where is she now?"

That girl, Hector said to himself, is not Vietnamese but Chinese. She's my age, not exactly a girl. She didn't wreck my life but changed it. She is in Hong Kong and I'm expecting a fax from her. It could be on my machine this instant. Please hope she writes in English. She writes in Chinese and it's half a day in Appendix Seven, digging up words I don't know, and taking time I haven't got. To his father, he said simply, "She's back in Vietnam."

"You were a fool in love," his father said.

"That's my name," Hector said. Ask me again, and I'll. . . ."

"Your name's Hector," Mark replied. "We named you after the warrior."

"And your name's Mark," Hector said. "You were named after the apostle."

"You dodged the draft," Mark said.

And you, Hector did not say, never lived up to your name, either. World of hypocrites?

"Your Vietnamese girl, I never could pronounce her name."

"Yes," Hector said. "It was very difficult. Her name was Ho." Ho Chuan Yu, actually, he thought. Spring Rain Ho. A pre-Cultural Revolution name. Unlike the recent arrivals he had contacted at the bus station, Qing Xin (Clear Heart), named after Mao's wife, ironically enough, her parents clearly innocent of all the behind-the-scenes ugliness, Mao's relentless philandering and his distaste for the former actress, to be named after a Gang of Four leader after all; and Ms. Kai Yan, the really pretty one, even in her travel exhaustion, named after a poem by Mao, her name meaning "let the performance begin." Before them, Hong Xing (Red Star), Xiao Hong (Little Red), Xue Jun (Learn from the Army); Hong Jun (Red Army), Xing Jun (Happy Army). . . . Hector and Ms. Ho had an exchange of faxes playing facetiously with the idea of

American equivalents of names like these. American Flag Jones; White House Smith; Semper Fidelis Greene; Remember the Maine Kowalski; Stars and Stripes Forever Schmidt; Victory Over Japan (VJ, they call her) Trask; Enola Gay McCracken. . . .

But you understand, Ms. Ho said later via telephone, these names were lamb's blood on the lintel. They were meant to ward off the avenging angels of the Mao cult. In some societies, you know, people name their children perversely, so the gods won't be jealous. You might have been named, say, Stupid Boy Holt, or Untalented Holt.

You called me Stupid once, Hector said.

I did not, she protested.

Oh, yes, I called you *shi jie zui mei li de nu ren*, World's Most Beautiful Woman. And you said, *Shi jie zui ben de ren*, World's Stupidest Man.

Because you were foolish to think me that beautiful, of course.

That's my father's name for me. Fool in Love. It could be worse.

What's worse than being the world's stupidest man?

Nothing at all.

Hey, I'm teasing, Hector. You know, Chinese have many names in life—childhood name, school name, family name, college name. You had a college name.

I did?

Of course you did. When I first knew you, I thought you were named Carpenter. All your friends called you "Hey, Carpenter."

Oh, yeah. That was my summer job.

I know. Funny, though, that's what you've become. A carpenter.

To my dad's horror. He thought I'd become an engineer and move right into Starfield Technologies right behind him. It still bugs him that I changed majors. To this day.

Carpenter is nice word in Chinese, Ms. Ho had said. *Mu jin*. Transformer of wood.

My dad transformed metals. And I liked being called Carpenter, Hector said. It makes me think of a time when people knew where they fit in. I love those classic names: Baker, Butcher, Fisher, Weaver, Brewer, Shepherd, Smith, Mason, Keeler, Cooper. . . .

All right already, Ms. Ho had said. But obviously people didn't like their place always. That's why Bakers can now be Congresspeople. Something similar in China, though. We call them *lao bai xing*—old hundred names, common people's names. Wang, Chen, Li, Fong, Lin, Liu, Wu, Zhang, Ho. . . .

All right already, Hector said.

I should have predicted from your name what you would become, Ms. Ho said.

Why?

Remember we had a college talk about what was the most important of all human inventions?

No.

I said it was the computer. This was before anybody knew anything about computers. You don't remember what you said?

No, really I don't.

You said, "The nail."

That had been one expensive call, Hector remembered. They went on to discuss who the new arrivals might be, without mentioning names over the telephone. These people could have no names, for a while, at least. By fax Hector learned they were Li Bao Ai—Love Treasure Li; and Chen Hui Ming—Bright Shining Chen. They might be older, my age, Spring Rain's age, Hector thought, with names like that, and if they hadn't changed their names to hide from those inevitable authorities on either side, those jealous gods who could ruin your life.

"You still working?" Hector's father asked now.

"What?"

"Working!"

"Sorry," Hector said. "Bad hearing is an occupational disease of carpenters. Yes, I'm working. I'm renovating a cottage just down the street from your old house. Maybe you remember. The Skinner place?"

"Skinner?" Mark shrugged his shoulders. The gesture saddened Hector. There seemed to be so *little* inside those pajamas now. In the past, Father had seemed so huge, with great thick arms that could hoist Hector to the living-room ceiling and jostle him there wailing in laughter as his mother shrieked, "Mark! Don't! Please!"

"It's the place on the bend in the road. Has a tin roof still. Always had red shutters. Nice field in back. Skinner always had it in potatoes or corn."

"Skinner?" Father seemed totally fuddled now. "Names get away from me," he said. "Is he dead?"

"Just recently," Hector said. "That's how I came into the place. Estate sale. I'll fix it up for a client." For Ms. Ho Chuan Yu, if only I could tell you that, Hector thought. That's what I do, Father. I'm a criminal. "Illegal aliens" will move in, for a while, anyway. Li Love Treasure and Bright Shining Chen. They'll buy bicycles at a tag sale and work in

Chinese restaurants, for a while. They'll move on, Boston, New Haven, New York, Wallingford, Pittsburgh. . . . Because of Spring Rain Ho, who ruined, who changed my life, Hector thought.

When his father dozed off, Hector made a silent farewell and rushed home. The urine smell of Shining Tides Rest Home seemed to cling to him like a curse, perhaps a prophecy.

So far, for some reason, Ms. Ho had sent only one man, and all the rest had been women, and judging from the names—maybe—the next two would be women, too. Perhaps it was safer or easier to send women. Whatever the reason, it was OK with Hector. He wondered if Ms. Ho sent the men to someone else, or if she found passage for men at all, or if she just sent the women to him as a kind of tease, or a kind of gift, or a kind of statement: Look at them all. How many there are. So many like me, whatever their names.

No fax awaited him. Hector considered whether he should wait or take the opportunity to finish up a few things still hanging fire at the cottage. Waiting just made him anxious, the cottage was not far away and he could check back in two, three hours. From the basement he lugged up a box of Skilsaw gear and swung it into the bed of his pickup, which was full of scrap wood he should have dumped at the recycling center several days before. Just another one of those little chores he didn't get around to. In his own house, a drain in the upstairs shower leaked water into the ceiling of the downstairs bathroom and if he didn't take care of it, he was going to have a big mess, and a big project on his hands. The basement door wouldn't shut properly, a window in the garage door was broken and all the trim around the house was looking ragged—among other things. But he wanted the cottage to be ready for the pair Ms. Ho was sending him. He'd surely have time to attend to his own house later. He'd have the tag end of the fall if the Florida contractors he had signed on with for his winter work didn't call too soon. Hector wasn't ready to leave New England. Fall was his favorite time of year.

Hector let himself in the back door of the cottage and set up in the kitchen, where he would have good light for measuring and cutting his boards. In the rear of the house, the kitchen looked out onto a field covered now in beautiful dark-green rye grass, and then a patch of drying corn, and then the row of big elms and sycamores that marked the banks of the river. Their leaves were golden now, and came down in a gently flickering snowfall. You could not see the river from the kitchen window, but Hector sensed it there, not all that far away, gliding through

the fields, parting around the smoky red boulder local folks called The Snake's Head. Surely the newcomers would think it resembled a dragon.

Hector wondered, as he worked, whether the cottage had ever heard Chinese spoken within its walls. Surely it was no stranger to the river beyond, in olden days, before flood control. He finished trimming out a wall in the basement that would provide an extra room, one you could access quickly through a closet in the bedroom above and down a narrow set of stairs Hector had completed a few days before. This little detail was the reason he had not taken out the usual building permit and was working alone, and in the rear of the house, his pickup tucked out of sight. The escape route almost certainly would not have been approved by the building inspector, and it wouldn't be hard to recognize for what it was. For that matter, it wouldn't escape detection by anyone who searched the house diligently, but it would otherwise give the occupants some genuine privacy and provide them with just a few more minutes' head start if it became necessary to escape. You would keep a bag here, Hector thought, ready to go. And that could happen. People were paying more attention to illegals now. There was unease in the melting pot.

The idea for the secret room had actually come from Hector's father, from an earlier time, perhaps as long ago as 40 years. Mark had coerced the family into one of those weekend trips he liked to places such as Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, or Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, or Plymouth or Concord to the home of someone like Nathaniel Hawthorne. On this occasion, however, Mark had imprisoned the family in the station wagon for a trip to Wallingford, Connecticut, where his family had ancestry, and some scandal involving a bigamous great-great-grandfather, which Hector's mother was fond of alluding to. The great-great-grandfather had had a wife in Wallingford, where he owned a lumber yard, and a wife in Maine, near Jay, where he owned timberland and a sawmill. He traveled routinely between these two locations, and the two families he kept remained ignorant of each other until the old man's funeral. All that land and real estate had been swept out of the family's possession in the Depression years. The old homestead, however, had become a restaurant and inn, and that was the destination Mark had chosen for the weekend history lesson.

After a meal the children found huge but tediously ordinary Yankee fare, the family took rooms above the dining area. Mark and Mabel stayed in one; in another Hector was forced to sleep in the same bed

with his younger brother, Hank (named after Henry Ford, in fact), while his sister had the twin bed all to herself. They had settled into restless, jostling sleep for only a short while when Mark and Mabel shook them awake, made sure they were wrapped in robes and wore slippers, then took them on a strange, surely unlawful and whispered tour of the old house—by flashlight. A hidden door opened at the end of the upstairs hallway, awing the children; a narrow stairway descended into cobwebby darkness, seemingly forever, since even Father's flashlight beam could not penetrate its depths. In the dark mystery of that stairwell, Father's flashlight beam picked out the backs of secret doors that might have led them into the rooms of the innocent sleepers beyond—heavy doors marked with crude slashes of a knife, or ax, or adze—I, II, III, IV. . . . And down they went into that darkness until they emerged in the stony basement, where they were gratified to discover the civilized hum of machines automatically washing and drying the inn's linens and aprons and service uniforms.

Now Father and Mother led them past the whirring and sloshing of the laundry into a deep passage that was clearly used now to store all the odd gear the innkeepers would haul out to celebrate the changes of the seasons. Hector remembered the oddness, in their sleepy, half-dreaming state, of encountering a scarecrow there in that dim passage, and then a silver Christmas tree hung with reflective red balls. On they went. Incredibly, Father forced open a door at the top of a series of flat stone steps and the family spilled out into moonlight. A gust of wind crashed into the leaves of the huge maples surrounding them, and then all was suddenly quiet again.

"There was a shed here," Father said. "And a place for horses. In those years the runaways would have been brought to the shed, some of them even in barrels or crates. And that is how they'd get into the house and be cared for until they were well enough and ready enough to move farther along."

"Runaways?" Aurora had asked, clutching Mabel's thigh.

"That's right," Father said. Hector remembered his grinning triumphantly at the wonderful ordeal he had put them all through to reveal this bit of secret family lore.

"Mother, what's a runaway?"

"A slave, idiot!" Henry Ford had said.

"That's right," Father said. "Your wicked bigamist great-great-grandfather also ran a station on the underground railroad. Ex-slaves prob-

ably traveled from here with him into Maine. Some found jobs in the woods up there, cutting logs."

"I don't understand railroad," Aurora said.

"A secret railroad, yes. Moving slaves out of the South, up to Canada eventually. Through this house! In those secret passages you came through!"

"Now you know what it was like," Mabel said. "Don't you?"

"I don't think any of us can know what it was like exactly," Father said.

A man shape detached from the darkness of the porch then, drifted toward them and materialized. He was tall and black and dressed in a tuxedo and to Hector he seemed tired but a bit amused. "I see you found your way all right," he said to Mark.

"Ah, yes, and thanks so much," Father said. "It's great you've kept everything intact."

"Historical Register and all that," the man said. "Can't change too much, even if I want to. Was thinking of rebuilding the stable here, though. What do you think?"

"Oh, I think you should," Father said. "Terrific idea."

"Sell cider and souvenirs out of it," the man said.

"Why not?" Father said.

"Got some hot cider and doughnuts for your troops, too," the man said. "Come on back into the kitchen." He gestured grandly, broadly, theatrically. "It's all ready."

"Thanks, Jake," Father said.

"Anytime, Mr. Holt. No trouble at all. Nice to see kids learning something. And if you woke any folks stumbling around in there, we'll just tell 'em it was some kind of poltergeist party. Folks love a haunted house."

My stairs, at least, Hector thought now, will have a little light over them.

When he returned home, Hector found a fax waiting for him from Ms. Ho. She had obviously been in a hurry when she composed it, because halfway through the message she dropped English and scribbled along in Chinese. He struggled to read it, but his vocabulary just couldn't cope with the complexity of the message and he found it necessary to haul out his Chinese/English dictionary and turn to Appendix Seven, where Chinese words were listed according to two keys—a "radical," a small portion of the character indicating its most general frame of reference; and the number of strokes it takes to write the character properly. Searching for new words was a chore Hector despised, but until he

developed the sheer brute memory necessary to handle even a basic Chinese vocabulary, he had no other recourse. He supposed he knew why Ms. Ho put him through this. Surely she overestimated his ability, for one thing; and for another, her using Chinese was something of a precaution against someone's casually stumbling across one of her faxes and learning the truth.

"I must be so careful," she had once written to Hector. "That's the hardest thing. Naturally, I'm not a careful person. I play it pretty loose. I leave a trail of socks and lost sunglasses everywhere I go. I'm easily distracted. Becoming disciplined enough to do this thing I want to do and to protect the people I do it for—you can't imagine the effort, the double-checking, the self-override it requires of me. Can you? I have always thought you had more patience and a better ability to focus your attention. You don't hit your thumb the way I would driving nails. That's why I need you in this. So learn Chinese. You must. And use Appendix Seven."

Once Hector got past the fog of unfamiliar characters, the message was clear enough: The two women were on their way from the West Coast. They would have been traveling quite a long time and would be exhausted and their travel and bribery money would surely have been used up, and therefore Ms. Ho was transferring what she could to the usual account. Hector should continue to take what he needed for the renovations and the expenses of getting them settled. By train from Seattle this time. They had had a scare at the Canadian border and had almost bolted and been lost. Li Bao Ai—Love Treasure Ai—and Chen Hui Ming—Bright Shining Chen—were to arrive in Springfield in two days' time. They had an escort as far as Chicago. They were supposed to change trains in New York and that could present a problem, though Chen spoke a little English and therefore Hector should not panic if they did not show up as scheduled and he had to return for the next train, or the next. He should introduce himself as Mr. Carpenter.

Bad enough, Hector thought, the scrawled characters, but Ms. Ho's run-on style made it even more difficult to sort out her ideas. The simple message of maybe 200 words took Hector nearly three hours to decipher and translate. He made a few notes on details, then put Ms. Ho's fax into the flame of a burner on the kitchen stove.

He hated doing this, as he hated destroying anything from her hand. He knew he had saved letters he should have burned, but they were precious to him, as she herself was, and he wondered if he would have

persisted in this impossible pursuit of learning Chinese if it were not her voice he heard speaking when he looked the words up, if the whole study had not been eroticized by his memory of their long-ago connection. *Ta yi ding shi yi ai zuo de feng zi ren*, he thought: He really was a fool in love. Surely there was also some selfish hope of his that one of the women Ms. Ho kept sending through his hands would replace her? Perhaps all his "noble" actions could be reduced to that: He was a prisoner of his memory, and the skill with which Ms. Ho made use of it. All right, Hector thought, I allow myself to be a fool. I accept my name. *Mei guanxi*. It doesn't matter. I know myself to be a fool. Ms. Ho's fool. Everyone's fool. Father was right all along. She ruined my life. The difference is—I'm damned glad of it.

Oh, yes, he reminded himself as the letter flared and he swung it into the sink, turn on the gas for them, show them the pilot lights. *Pilot light*, he thought. How to say that in Chinese? Pilot, *fei xing yuan*, literally means one who flies planes; flame was *huo yan*—person who flies plane flames. Obviously, it was not a phrase that was going to translate into anything but surreal nonsense. What did the Chinese call such an ordinary thing? The thought of all those words for all the things in this world made Hector despair of ever learning Chinese.

The next two days Hector spent in the cottage finishing the renovations. He also juggled the money in the bank accounts he shared and didn't share with Ms. Ho's travel agency and real-estate-acquisitions firm. And then he looked in on his father, who barely seemed to know who he was, and who on the second day got out of bed only when the aides came by and lifted him and helped him down the hall to the bathroom. Hector left Shining Tides feeling ravaged. Maybe that heart attack he feared so much would not be such a terrible thing, he told himself, if it spared him an ending as unkempt and anticlimactic as his father's. And, he thought guiltily, meanly, angering himself with himself, at about 200 bucks a day.

Although he had done it often enough before, Hector drove on the third morning to the train station in Springfield. He drove what had been his father's Mercedes, a lime-yellow behemoth beginning to show its age, but with the room for passengers his own pickup didn't have. His paranoia kicked in big-time, bigger than ever. Every suit he saw made him flinch, and every uniform. Yes, but, he reminded himself. This is not when and where they get it. They get it when they're on the job and don't have papers. They get it when they need hospital care or

some service or need to buy something on credit. They get it when they cross somebody with an attitude about "illegals," somebody scared about the scarcity of jobs. Somebody who believes it's possible for another person on this planet to be "illegal." Ms. Ho herself refused to discuss how much trouble she would be in if the trail were traced back to her. "I got enough to worry about from China," she had said. So Hector tried to calm himself down.

They were easy to recognize when they stepped from the train. They looked as though they had been thrown into a pond and dragged out by the hair. They still wore that hair Chinese style, quite long, and the hair showed the effects of sleeping on train seats and elsewhere forever—pieces of lint and straw seemed to cling to it. They also wore Chinese-style black slacks and cotton jackets too light for the New England fall. Their shoes were flat, pointed, black, embroidered like slippers. Their baggage was simple, plastic imitation leather, with imitation plaid sides, bulging and too heavy; and when they turned to face Hector, their expressions were the expressions Hector found so devastating and thrilling: forlorn, wary, resigned, eager, almost crazy.

"*Ni men hao*," he said. "*Wo shi Ka Pen Ta. Wo shi ni men de xin xing dao. Qing rang wo na chu ni men de xing li*." Hello. I'm Carpenter. I'm your new guide. Let me take your luggage.

"Oh, thank you," the taller one said. "But we can help ourselves."

"OK," Hector said. "Right this way." As he led them out, opening doors, he looked at everyone, every suit, every face. Once again, it was going to be OK. Yes, it was. Outside he unlocked the car doors and placed the luggage in the trunk. All clear, no problem. No one was rushing toward them. No cruiser was sliding in behind. What a beautiful fall day it was!

Ni men dou yi ding you yi ge chang chang de lu xing. Surely you've both had an awfully long trip.

Yi ge xushishi, the smaller one said. She had a chin as pointed as a knife, a deep dimple under one cheek.

Hector did not know the word *xushishi*, but assumed it meant something like "ordeal." He promised the women a nice rest in half an hour. And something to eat. Of course they were hungry.

In fact, they were too hungry to demur. The taller one volunteered it had been a while since they had "snacked."

You'll be in this area awhile, I think, Hector said in Chinese. We'll have time to get to know one another, surely. Most important thing

now is to rest and relax.

"Will you teach us English?" the taller one asked. Her eyes were screaming with excitement, Hector thought. "I speak a little," she said.

"I'm not a good teacher, but I'll try," Hector said.

"We know," the woman said. "You are carpenter."

He led them, stunned and disoriented, into the living room in the cottage, where they dropped their luggage. Then he gave them a quick tour of the rest of the house, showed them how to use the shower, and then showed them the hidden stairs to the secret room. They immediately understood its necessity and its possible uses. There was food in the refrigerator and cupboards and tomorrow or whenever they were ready, he would come by and take them shopping. He wrote his number on a piece of paper and stuck it to the refrigerator with a banana-shaped magnet. Oh, yes, he said. I'll show you how to turn the gas on and off. He showed them the tanks outdoors and how to screw the gas lines open; back inside, he lifted the cover to the stove and lit the pilot lights. What do you call these things in Chinese? he asked.

Xiao huo, both women answered almost in synchrony.

Little flame, Hector thought. How simple after all! Like these two women. Two little flames. Waiting.

At home he found messages on his telephone answering machine. The first was from the director of Shining Tides, informing him that his father had died just that morning. The second was from Love Treasure and Bright Shining Chen, who must have dialed his number the minute he left the cottage door. They apologized for failing to thank him properly, and could he forgive them? He called the women back at once. It's all right, he said. It's something I'm glad to do. I'm repaying a debt to an old friend. Now get some rest and I'll see you tomorrow.

Mr. O'Connor at Shining Tides assured Hector that his father was being taken care of according to the procedures they had already agreed upon. Dr. Scott had made the pronouncement an hour ago—by natural causes. Northampton Memorial Services was on the way. Hector could be there, if he wished, to oversee the removal of the body. There was nothing in his notes, Mr. O'Connor said, about any spiritual accompaniment.

"I'll take care of that," Hector said. "And I'll be right there."

He sat by his father only a few moments before the men from the undertaker arrived. His father seemed almost not to exist, and he was transferred almost effortlessly to the gurney. As his father floated away, Hector felt an eerie lightness and exhilaration pushing aside his grief.

His father's adventure had come to an end. The family's fate was on his own shoulders now, and quite possibly it was going to ruin and non-existence after all these years, except, that is, for the bigamous great-great-grandfather's side of the family. His father's secrets had long ago been buried when he ceased to exist as a person and became a body waiting for some relief from all its organic miseries. Everything was now consigned to Hector's memory. He would call brother and sister, of course. He would be chided for not keeping them up to date on Father's condition. Then he would fax Ms. Ho and tell her that her precious cargo had arrived, and was ready to begin another chapter in life. He was determined to write to her in Chinese.

His father's body was placed inside the funeral van like a pile of rags. The doors were closed gently, but they rang like bells in Hector's mind. I wonder what would change, he thought, if we really knew the truth about each other?

Of Roads and a Pasture: *The Genesis of Two Poems by Robert Frost*

BY LEA BERTANI NEWMAN

Note: The narrative-commentaries accompanying Frost's poems are excerpts from a book in progress scheduled for publication in the fall of 2000 by The New England Press.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

This is Robert Frost's most quoted poem—and his most misunderstood. It was intended as a gentle joke on a dear friend who had a habit of not being able to make up his mind. But the friend did not see the satire in it when he first read the poem—and neither do the subsequent host of readers who take the poem to be a straightforward call to follow the road less traveled.

During the years Frost spent in England, he developed a close friendship with Edward Thomas, a fellow writer with whom he shared an interest in botanizing (Thompson *Early* 441, 452–67; Thompson *Triumph* 87–88). They took long walks together, Thomas leading the way through his native Gloucestershire countryside in search of rare plants. Regardless of how successful their expeditions were, he would inevitably regret not having taken another path where the finds might have been richer. After one fruitful excursion, Frost said to him, "No matter which road you take, you'll always sigh, and wish you'd taken another" (Thompson *Triumph* 88).

This idea, even to the sigh, became the nucleus of one stanza of "The Road Not Taken," written, as Frost recalled it, "while I was sitting on a sofa in the middle of England" in 1914 (Thompson *Triumph* 546). He did not complete the poem until the following year, after he and his family had returned to the United States and were living in New Hampshire (Angyal 77, 99; Cook "Frost" 65). Thomas' letters to Frost in 1915 were more indecisive than ever, struggling with the larger issue of whether or not Thomas should enlist in the war against Germany. Frost, hoping to put a lighter spin on his friend's vacillations, mailed a copy of the poem to him, but Thomas assumed the "I" in the poem was Frost, as many readers after him have done, and did not recognize himself as its target (Thompson *Letters* xv). In response to Frost's explanation, Thomas wrote, "I doubt if you can get anyone to see the fun of the thing without showing them and advising them" (Thompson *Triumph* 89). In September 1915, Frost admitted as much in a letter to Louis Untermeyer,

who had written some parodies of Frost: "The best of your parody of me was that it left me in no doubt as to where I was hit. I'll bet not half a dozen people can tell who was hit and where he was hit by my Road Not Taken" (Untermeyer 14).

However, this poem is more than merely a parody. Crossroads and the dilemma they pose have long been a part of literary tradition, markedly in the works of some of Frost's favorite writers—Virgil, Emily Dickinson, William James, Longfellow, Emerson and Thoreau (Cramer 45–46). Frost's sensitivity to the crossroads metaphor is clear in the following observation recorded in a letter to Susan Hayes Ward in 1912:

Two lonely cross-roads that themselves cross each other I have walked several times this winter without meeting or overtaking so much as a single person on foot or on runners. The practically unbroken condition of both for several days after a snow or a blow proves that neither is much traveled. (Sergeant 87)

Written in Plymouth, New Hampshire, six months before Frost's departure for England, this passage also establishes a New England source that predates his walking experiences with Thomas.

Except for a warning to his readers "to be careful . . . it's a tricky poem" (Cook *Voice* 112), Frost had little more to say about the meaning of "The Road Not Taken," allowing his readers free play with whatever they chose to find in it. He did, however, alert them to its form, pointing out, "You can go along over these rhymes just as if you didn't know that they were there." This was a poem "that talks past the rhymes," he said, and he took it as a compliment when his readers told him they could hear him talking in it (Cook *Voice* 123).

THE PASTURE

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may);
I sha'n't be gone long. —You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I sha'n't be gone long. —You come too.

For the nine years that Robert Frost and his family lived on their farm in Derry, New Hampshire, the view looking west from the large bay window at the front of the house was of two small pastures (Cramer 10). One spring evening in 1905, Frost took a walk over those fields with his wife, Elinor, and their six-year-old daughter, Lesley. According to the notebook Lesley kept as a child, she and her mother picked apple and strawberry blossoms while her father went down to the southwest corner of the big cow pasture to check on how much water was in the spring (Lesley Frost 37). Five years later, Frost used a walk to the spring in a cow pasture as the centerpiece of his poem "The Pasture." The experience was still a favorite memory 30 years after he wrote about it. In 1940 he reminisced, "I never had a greater pleasure than coming on a neglected spring in a pasture in the woods" (Smythe 56).

When Frost chose to publish this poem in 1914 as a prologue to his second book, *North of Boston*, he clearly meant the "you" in "You come too" to mean the reader. And in his first collected edition, as in those that have followed, it has remained an invitation to the reader to join Frost in his poetic explorations of the New England countryside, with its pasture springs and cows and calves.

Surprising, then, is Frost's assertion that "The Pasture" is a love poem, suggesting that the original "you" was his wife. He went on to explain: It is "a poem about love that's new in treatment and effect. You won't

find anything in the range of English poetry just like that" (Richards 20). The unique situation in the poem has an intensely personal connection with the long-standing tempestuous relationship between Frost and Elinor (Thompson *Early* 173–89, 310–12; Katz 15–25, 48–50). He appears to have had misgivings about Elinor's love since their courtship days, when she was reluctant to leave Lawrence University to accept his proposal of marriage. The differences between them and the extent of his doubts and anger are revealed in a dreamlike incident Lesley remembered from when she was seven: One night her father woke her up, revolver in hand, to ask her to choose between her mother and him, because one of them would be dead by morning (Thompson 308). However, Frost's more usual response when his frustrations overwhelmed him was to storm out of the house for long walks alone in the woods, often not returning until after dark. The gentle invitation in the poem asking Elinor to join him on his walk is in striking contrast to the rejection he was expressing every time he walked away from her. The renewals associated with springtime—the reinvigorated pasture spring, the newborn calf—contribute to the poem's plea for another beginning, a rebirth of their togetherness.

Another claim Frost made for this poem was that it could be used "to express the opposite of confusion." He admitted that "confusion" was a word he "always had an interest in." He thought watching "the uncloudiness displace the cloudiness" in the spring could "be taken as a figure of speech" for his goal of seeing "clarity come out of . . . confusion" (Smythe 56–57). The passage "And wait to watch the water clear" from the first verse became the epigraph for his last book of poems, *In the Clearing*, published in 1962, the year before he died. At 87, he was still seeking an unclouded vision.

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Letters

To the Editor:

Thanks so much for sending me the two issues of *The Mind's Eye*, just received. I'm really very impressed by both the contents and the presentations in these journals. The range and variety are also impressive.

It's a credit to your college and also puts you one up on the Williams College establishment—I don't think it's ever tried anything so ambitious.

I did not see a subscription blank, but sign me up if possible and I will send in a check.

James MacGregor Burns
Williamstown, MA

To the Editor:

Thank you for *The Mind's Eye* [Spring 1993]—a publication that does honor to MCLA. The article on M.P.'s [Maurice Prendergast's] late work was a surprise and a delight, also a fine example of scholarship.

You won't mind if I add an *irrelevant* but also *irreverent* side reaction? For me, M.P. was a fine artist in his youth, notably late 1890s and 1900s/1910s—and then went gradually downhill creatively. Also, his *fine* work is in watercolors. I never have "bought" his oils. So the connection for them (with dance, etc.) stands; but I wonder what Isadora would have thought of her performance in M.P.'s versions!

Forgive me.

Lane Faison
Williamstown, MA

Note: Letters and comments are welcome. Address them to The Editor, *The Mind's Eye*, Campus Box 9132, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, 375 Church Street, North Adams, MA 01247

Contributors

Robert Abel has published three collections of stories and three novels. *Ghost Traps* won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction in 1989. His most recent novel, *Riding a Tiger*, was published last January by Asia 2000 in Hong Kong. Abel has taught writing and American literature in China on three occasions, and recently worked as a specialist for the United States Information Agency, giving lectures and workshops to English teachers in Southeast Asia on the characteristics of literary English and perpetual paradoxes in American literature. He lives in North Hadley.

Rosanne Fleszar Denhard teaches literature and composition at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, where she has been a part-time member of the English and Communications department since 1996. Denhard's work in literary studies centers on the relationship between literary texts and history, with primary focus on medieval and Renaissance England. In 1999 she received departmental recognition for innovation in teaching.

Peter Filkins teaches literature and writing at Simon's Rock College of Bard. His book of poems, *What She Knew*, was published in 1998 by Orchises Press. He is the translator of Ingeborg Bachmann's collected poems, *Songs in Flight*, and his translation of two novels by Bachmann has just been published by Northwestern University Press. Filkins has also translated a novel by Alois Hotschnig titled *Leonardo's Hands*, published by the University of Nebraska Press. His writing has appeared in numerous journals, including *Partisan Review*, *The New Republic* and *Poetry*. Filkins previously taught at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

Elizabeth Lambert's articles on Virginia Woolf and science have appeared in several publications, including *Twentieth Century Literature*. Formerly a science writer for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she now teaches literature and film at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. An associate professor in the English and Communications department, she has recently participated in independent film productions.

Lea Bertani Newman is professor emerita of English at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. She has published two books and numerous essays on 19th-century American literature. As past president of the Hawthorne Society and the Melville Society, she remains active in both organizations. Newman's current project, a guide to the New England poetry of Robert Frost for the general reader, grew out of her experiences in the classroom with non-English majors who responded enthusiastically to Frost's poetry.

Cynthia Richardson has produced six seasons of reviews of Williamstown Theatre Festival productions for her local paper, *The Chatham Courier*, and a scholarly article on *The Canterbury Tales* for *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. Her poems have appeared in *The Berkshire Review* and *The Amherst Review*, and a poem will soon appear in *Threepenny Review*. She is currently working on a book titled *Only You Can Reform Education: A Guerrilla Manual for Parents*. For 21 years she taught literature and creative writing in high schools and community colleges.

Rosemary Starace, a writer and visual artist living in Pittsfield, writes: "I have an odd but enduring interest in the symbolic resonances of circles, egg shapes and round vessels—both my artwork and my writing are riddled with them." She is also curious about the nature of place and the role of the artist in the local community. Starace has written a number of articles and essays on these subjects. One of her poems recently appeared in *The Berkshire Review*. Her artwork is currently shown at Nuovo Gallery in Lenox.

THE MIND'S EYE

Writer's Guidelines

While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, *The Mind's Eye* focuses on a general communication of ideas of interest to a liberal arts college. We welcome expository essays as well as fiction, poetry and art from faculty and guest contributors. We publish twice a year. The deadline for the Fall issue is July 15. Deadline for the Spring issue is January 15.

Submissions should adhere to these guidelines:

1. Submit unpublished manuscripts both on paper and on disk, using either PC or MAC platform word-processing programs. Manuscripts should be typed double spaced. Your name, address, phone number and e-mail address, if available, should be listed on the cover sheet; your name should appear at the top of each page.
2. We will consider simultaneous submissions under the provision that the author notify us of this and contact us immediately if the material is accepted elsewhere.
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Tony Gengarely, Managing Editor
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